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Illegal Israeli actions in Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Security Council
Sixty-fourth year

Letter dated 28 December 2009 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

As the world celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ, the messenger of peace and love to humanity, Israel, the occupying Power, continues to impose its collective punishment and punitive measures against the Palestinian people. Bethlehem, besieged by Israel's illegal Wall and settlement regime, is also being systematically isolated and disconnected from Palestinian Christians and pilgrims from around the world by illegal and brutal Israeli policies and practices, including measures of collective punishment in grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip remain trapped and forced to endure one more holiday and the start of yet another year under the illegal, unjust and inhumane blockade. This Christmas, Israel, the occupying Power, granted permits to less than 20 per cent of the Palestinian Christians in the Gaza Strip who wanted to exercise their right to worship and to visit their holy sites in Bethlehem and Jerusalem on this important religious occasion. Only a fraction of the barely 400 Gazans granted permits were let out of Gaza in the end.

Palestinian Christians in the West Bank are also suffering similarly. Barely 30 per cent of those who applied for a permit to visit Jerusalem during the holiday were allowed. Israel's continued violation of Palestinians' basic rights, including the freedom of worship, should be loudly condemned by the international community, and demands must be made upon the occupying Power to abide by all of its legal obligations and to cease violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

Palestinians, Muslims and Christians should not need to apply for a permit to visit their holy sites in their own homeland. This practice, which is increasingly becoming more punitive, is part of Israel's systematic policy aimed at keeping Palestinians disconnected from one another, denying them their freedom of movement and their basic rights to worship and assemble, which has been cumulatively shredding the very foundations of the society over the many long years of this brutal occupation.

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Israel, the occupying Power, also launched yet another repressive campaign earlier this month against activists in peaceful, popular demonstrations of resistance and protest against the illegal Wall and settlements. This campaign included the arrest of a number of activists of the Popular Committee to resist the illegal Wall and settlements in different areas of the Occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

On 10 December 2009, the Israeli occupying forces arrested Abdullah Abu Rahmah, a schoolteacher and coordinator of the Bil'in Popular Committee against the Wall and Settlements, which has carried out a five-year campaign of non-violent protest and legal challenge against the Wall. A large number of Israeli occupying forces stormed the Al-Tira neighbourhood of Ramallah and raided the house of Abu Rahmah and took him to an unknown location. He was indicted by an Israeli court on 22 December 2009 on several counts stemming from his leadership role in the Popular Committee. Since June 2009, 31 residents of Bil'in have been arrested by Israeli occupying forces.

On 29 July 2008, 10-year-old Ahmad Husam Yousef Mousa was killed by the Israeli occupying forces while he was running as they opened fire on demonstrators against the Wall in Ni'lin. On 17 April 2009, Bassem Abu Rahmah (30 years old) was killed during a demonstration in the village of Bil'in. He participated in the weekly protest against Israel's annexation Wall and was shouting at the Israeli occupying forces, "We are in a non-violent protest, there are kids and internationals". He could not continue his scream and was shot in the chest and killed by the Israeli occupying forces with a new kind of tear gas canister ("the rocket").

On 15 December 2009, Israeli occupying forces arrested Jamal Juma', one of the leaders of the Popular Campaign against the Wall and Settlements, and a member of the Palestinian National Committee for the Register of Damage caused by the Illegal Wall, at the Qalandiya checkpoint, north of Occupied East Jerusalem. After hours of interrogation, Israeli occupying forces handcuffed Mr. Juma' and took him back to his home on Jabal Al-Mukaber (Mount Scopus). As his wife and three children watched in horror, the Israeli occupying forces searched Mr. Juma's home for two hours, and confiscated his computer and private mobile phone. As they were leaving the house, one Israeli soldier threatened Mr. Juma's wife by saying that they will not see him again. Mr. Juma' was then transferred to Almaskubia detention centre, where he remains detained without charge. The Israeli occupying forces also detained Mohammed Othman, coordinator of youth activities in the protest campaign against the Wall and the settlements and a number of other non-violence activists.

On 17 December 2009, Israeli occupying forces raided the house of 18-year-old Salam Kanaan in Ramallah, under the pretext of searching for the original version of the videotape that she filmed on 7 July 2008, which documents an Israeli soldier, in the presence of his commander, shooting a detained Palestinian civilian, Ashraf Abu Rahmah, who was handcuffed and blindfolded, in Ni'lin village west of Ramallah.

In addition to these illegal, brutal and oppressive actions, Israel has also continued innumerable other acts of military aggression against the Palestinian people in a deliberate attempt to further destabilize the fragile situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and reignite the deadly

cycle of violence between the two sides, and in order to evade the increasing international pressure on the Israeli Government and to camouflage its responsibility for obstructing the efforts to revive the peace process.

On Saturday, 26 December 2009, Israeli occupying forces killed six Palestinians in two separate attacks. In Nablus, in the occupied West Bank, Israeli occupying forces stormed the city in the early hours of the day and assassinated Ra'ed Al-Sarkaji, Ghassan Abu Sharkh and Anan Subih in cold blood. Prime Minister Salam Fayyad affirmed that this operation was a dangerous escalation targeting the security and stability achieved by the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. In Gaza, on the eve of the first anniversary of Israel's brutal, ruthless and destructive war against the Gaza Strip, Israeli occupying forces shot and killed three Palestinians near the Beit Hanoun crossing. The three were identified as Mahmoud Al-Sharat'ha, Hani Abu Ghazal and Bashir Abu D'heil, all in their early twenties.

The international community, including the Security Council, has clear responsibilities in this regard and must stand firm and take urgent measures to redress this grave situation and bring an end to Israeli violations of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law. Israel should not be allowed to continue to enjoy impunity. It must be held accountable for its war crimes and violations and compelled to be in conformity with the laws and principles civilized nations and peoples live by.

This letter is in follow-up to our previous 351 letters to you regarding the ongoing crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, since 28 September 2000. These letters, dated from 29 September 2000 (A/55/432-S/2000/921) to 14 December 2009 (A/ES-10/471-S/2009/662), constitute a basic record of the crimes being committed by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people since September 2000. For all of these war crimes, acts of State terrorism and systematic human rights violations committed against the Palestinian people, Israel, the occupying Power, must be held accountable and the perpetrators must be brought to justice.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of the present letter distributed as a document of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 5, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Dr. Riyad **Mansour**
Ambassador
Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations